



Classical American Homes Preservation Trust

and The Richard Hampton Jenrette Foundation





To Friends, Donors and Preservationists

From Dick Jenrette

Classical American Homes Preservation Trust had by far its best year ever in 2014. Annual revenue more than doubled to \$6,666,554 up from \$3,183,698 in the prior year. Expenses were moderately well controlled — up about 8% to \$2,496,646 vs. \$2,311,149 in 2013. As a result, reported net income soared to \$4,169,908, nearly a five-fold increase from \$872,549 in 2013.

As many of our readers know, I like to “adjust” these reported earnings to include changes in *unrealized* securities gains, add back non-cash depreciation charges, and subtract non-cash gifts — mostly antiques and real estate. It’s not that we don’t appreciate receiving these non-cash gifts — we certainly do — but our focus is also on building an investment portfolio that will sustain CAHPT’s preservation activities over a long period of years. If we make these adjustments, here’s what our adjusted earnings look like:

	2014	2013
Reported Net Income	\$ 4,169,908	\$ 872,549
Add back:		
Depreciation Charges (non-cash)	339,999	328,881
Increase in Unrealized Appreciation of Securities	578,365	891,409
Subtract:		
Non-cash Gifts	(1,159,427)	(578,000)
Adjusted Net Income	\$3,928,845	\$1,511,839

On the cover: Wash Drawing of Edgewater by Van Day Truex (1904-1979), 1977. Van Day Truex did this sketch of Edgewater in 1971, following a weekend visit to Edgewater. Truex had been President of Parsons School of Design and later became design director of Tiffany’s. He was one of the most influential tastemakers of interior design of his era, beginning in the 1920’s.

Left: A tranquil late summer view of Edgewater on the Hudson. Photo: Gavin Ashworth.

These adjusted earnings, still impressive, could be considered akin to a cash flow statement for CAHPT.

As a result, CAHPT's portfolio of cash and marketable securities rose to a record high of \$16,052,431 in 2014, up from \$12,319,214 in the prior year. We have no debt. Our portfolio return of approximately 10% in 2014 was less than the prior year but still a respectable return for a portfolio that is very conservatively invested. Cash and short-term bonds (yielding almost nothing in today's low interest rate environment) accounted for approximately a third of total assets. This is our hedge against the real possibility of rising interest rates or some worse investment scenario.

Non-Recurring Gains

But what accounted for such a huge jump (doubling) of revenue in 2014? Unfortunately there's an old Wall Street expression that explains why: "Non-recurring gains." The biggest gains came from gifts of cash and securities to CAHPT, which nearly tripled to \$4,800,790 vs. \$1,678,027 in the prior year. This more than \$3 million increase is largely explained by two events. As reported last year, Bill Thompson, my long-time partner, and Director and Co-founder of CAHPT, sadly passed away in late 2013. In his estate, Bill left a substantial bequest to CAHPT. In addition, I elected to terminate the Richard H. Jenrette Foundation in 2014, with most of the proceeds also going to CAHPT. These two events combined added nearly \$3 million to CAHPT's contributions in 2014.

Not all gifts last year were "non-recurring." Especially encouraging to me was the steady growth in contributions to CAHPT by the rest of you – good friends and the growing ranks of other preservationists, most of whom have visited one or more of our six houses. Contributions of cash and securities from these sources in 2014 increased to \$1,303,949, up from \$1,128,027. That's a healthy 16% gain.

Building our Management Team

While building our investment portfolio is essential to CAHPT's future, even more important is building a management team with the experience and vision to guide CAHPT into the future. In this respect, we also made great progress in 2014. With Bill Thompson's passing (he was an ex-officio curator and constantly vigilant of the needs of the six houses) and my upcoming 86th birthday in April, it's essential to keep building our managerial expertise.

Against this background, the Board has promoted Margize Howell, who has worked closely with me for 30 years, starting as Donaldson, Lufkin and Jenrette's curator, to be Co-President. To join her as Co-President, we have been fortunate to recruit Peter Kenny, who is retiring from the American Wing of The Metropolitan Museum after a 30-year career as a Senior Curator and Administrator. Peter is renowned as one of the foremost experts on American furniture, especially of the 18th and 19th centuries (we have a lot of that in our six properties!). His two books on Duncan Phyfe and Charles-Honoré Lannuier furniture are the definitive sources on these subjects. Peter and Margize have been good friends and leaders in the museum/preservation field for more than 20 years and look forward to working together.

Elsewhere throughout the organization, we have been blessed with almost no turnover. Classical American Homes Preservation Trust seems to be a nice place to work. We have a veteran group of site managers led by Jack Smith, recently elected Executive Vice President – Operations. Jack is now in his 40th year of working with me. There is a high energy level throughout the organization. We also have an extremely capable and experienced Board of Directors. Since our founding 21 years ago, there has been virtually no turnover. Dr. Joseph M. (Buddy) Jenrette, my nephew in Charleston, S.C., is Vice-Chairman and I continue as Chairman.

Broadening our Focus

When most of us think about Classical American Homes' six sites, we tend to think and talk about the classical architecture of the houses. Yet that is only part of their charm. Somewhere along the way, Bill Thompson and I began to concentrate our collecting on American classical furniture — mostly early 19th century made in New York, much of it attributed to Duncan Phyfe. Most remarkably, much of the original furniture that was in these houses soon began to return — not so much by our research as by good luck. As a result, three of our sites — Edgewater, Millford Plantation and Ayr Mount — now have extraordinary collections of the original furnishings, most of it also by Duncan Phyfe. The addition of Peter Kenny, the foremost authority on Phyfe, to our management team is particularly fortuitous as we seek to broaden CAHPT's focus on the classical interiors and décor of these houses. Peter will also be helpful in expanding our educational programs and publications.

Great architecture, combined with the original classical furniture, certainly should be enough to make an interesting house museum. But, as any good realtor will tell you, in real estate it's all about "location, location, location." All of our houses happily are located on spectacularly beautiful sites, although Millford Plantation is in a remote location — part of its charm. Americans today also seem to have more interest in landscapes and gardening than house interiors. At Edgewater, for example, visitors spend more time on the grounds, surrounded by the Hudson River on three sides, with splendid views across the river to the Catskill Mountains. Just as we don't seem to feature our houses' exceptional collections of period furnishings, we also have not done enough to celebrate their extraordinary landscapes.

How We Differ

Harry du Pont was a pioneer in installing period rooms to display his magnificent collection of American furniture at Winterthur. This inspired many museums and private collectors to install period rooms to display their collections more appropriately. While someone once warned me, "Dick, you are no Harry du Pont," we have an edge on Mr. du Pont in one respect — classical furnishings that are displayed in the houses in which they were originally used, rather than removing period rooms and antiques to one centralized location, like Winterthur. I applaud all these preservation alternatives, starting with Winterthur, as well as the American Wing at The Met, and The White House itself, with some of America's best period rooms. I have to admit, however, that Thomas Jefferson's Monticello, with its classical architecture, original furnishings, and beautiful mountain location, still tops us all!

Sincerely,

Dick

Richard H. Jenrette
Founder and Chairman

Dick Jenrette seated in the small conservatory at Edgewater designed by A. J. Davis in 1852. Photo: Gavin Ashworth.





Poised to Celebrate 200 Years of Preservation and Hopefully 200 More

From Margize Howell

I am pleased to report that 2014 was a banner year for Classical American Homes Preservation Trust. It was a year of significant growth in many ways, with increases in visitation, donations and digital traffic. Underlying these numbers is a shift and increase in traction and momentum, as we see a rise in interest, participation and enthusiasm from our visitors. In planning interesting and diverse programs, building alliances with other like-minded organizations, and getting to know our visitors, we have attracted a wider and more diverse audience. We, in turn, are energized by all of you. This type of energy will help us not only celebrate the first 200 years of Ayr Mount in 2015, but will also keep the momentum going to preserve these houses for the next 200 years.

Visitation

In 2014 the visitation and revenues from CAHPT's and Dick Jenrette's houses were both up by almost 10%, reflecting individual attendance, group tours and programs. At Ayr Mount, there were increases in both visitation and revenues with house tours and Poet's Walk patronage up by 12% and 10% respectively, and overall revenues up nearly 35%. Similarly, Millford had a significant increase in its revenues, almost doubling last year's total due mostly to the tremendous success of the third *Music at Millford* concert. Millford's group tour numbers remained steady from 2013, while



Above: Portrait of *John Philips Montgomery* (1792-1842) by Jacob Eicholtz, circa 1823. This charming and life-size portrait of Master Montgomery painted by Eicholtz, later in his career, was painted at Eglinton, a long demolished house near Edgewater, with the Hudson River and the Catskill Mountains in the distance.

Opposite: The Red Room with some of the original Donaldson furniture by Duncan Phyfe, a portrait of *Susan Gaston Donaldson*, and a plaster bust of her father, Judge William Gaston of North Carolina. Photo: John M. Hall.

overall visitation was down slightly, due mainly to the fact that we hosted only one event there this year as opposed to two last year. Millford continues to be open to the public on the first Saturday of each month and to group tours year-round by appointment. Ayr Mount is open to the public Wednesdays through Sundays from March to December, and the adjoining scenic trails, Poet's Walk and Historic Occoneechee Speedway Trail (HOST) are open year-round.

Group tour patronage at Dick Jenrette's four private residences – Cane Garden, Roper House, Baker House and Edgewater – was consistent with that in 2013. However, overall attendance at the George F. Baker House in New York City increased 22% from last year, which was due in large part to several special events hosted there throughout the year. All fees and revenues from tours and events at these residences are given directly to Classical American Homes.

Of the CAHPT-owned properties, this year's leader in visitation is Ayr Mount, with the most group tours and individual attendance than any other property. Roper House remained the leader in visitation of Dick Jenrette's private residences. *Pro-bono* tours continued there in the Spring and Fall with large groups visiting from the Historic Charleston Foundation and the Preservation Society of Charleston.



Groups that visit our houses range from arts and preservation-oriented institutions and garden clubs, to educational, historical and other local groups. (See page 24 for a complete listing). The main visitor demographic continues to be the baby boomer, who has more time and resources to travel as they near and enter retirement. However, we are also working to attract the next generation of preservationists through special programs at several of the properties.

New Audiences and New Programs

Ayr Mount introduced new programs in the Spring and Fall, reaching both new and established audiences. In April, Ayr Mount hosted an “Appraisal Fair at Ayr,” modeled as its own version of the *Antiques Road Show*. Local experts from Leland Little Auctions, Whitehall Antiques and The Persian Carpet unlocked information about guests’ heirlooms and treasures such as portraits, silver and textiles. There were lectures on the subject of antiques (namely, how to identify them), as well as other topics. In the spring, Ayr Mount held an exhibition of American Coverlets featuring over 80 coverlets dating back to the late 18th century. The majority of the collections were on loan from Craufurd Goodwin. He and his wife, Nancy, own Montrose, Ayr Mount’s neighbor boasting a nationally recognized garden. In September, Ayr Mount also hosted two local preservation events attracting nearly 350 people from the Friends of the Mountain-to-Sea Trail and Preservation North Carolina.

In September, Millford hosted its third *Music at Millford* to a sold-out audience of over 150 guests, a 40% increase from last year. Robert DeMaine, Principal Cello of the Los Angeles Philharmonic, played an

Above: Grecian couch or *Recamier* made by Duncan Phyfe for Robert Donaldson about 1827, the year he purchased 15 State Street in lower Manhattan. Photo: Bruce Schwarz, courtesy of The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Opposite: The Octagon Library designed by A. J. Davis in 1852. Donaldson was one of the renowned architect’s earliest and most admired patrons. Photo: John M. Hall.

energetic and moving program of Debussy, Beethoven, Brahms and more, accompanied by pianist Jim Wilhelmsen. Performing in Millford’s elegant and classical double parlors, DeMaine described the acoustics at Millford as “excellent.” Classical architecture and classical music are certainly a winning combination!

In January, the George F. Baker Houses in New York City was the unofficial starting place of Americana Week, just two days before the opening of the Winter Antiques Show. Guests from MESDA, Colonial Williamsburg, and Winterthur joined us for a lively cocktail reception for the second year in a row. Despite a big blizzard, we had a wonderful turn out, which was not a surprise considering our good luck with attendance despite bad weather year after year! Later that week, the Decorative Arts Trust held a well-attended reception for Penny Hunt, recognizing her dedication as the organization’s Executive Director for the past 30 years. In the spring we welcomed to the Baker House over 200 friends and donors for our annual Spring Patrons Party, with a 20% increase in participation from last year. This was a terrific occasion to see friends and donors again and to thank them for their support. The Garden Conservancy, whose core mission is to save and share outstanding American gardens, held a reception for its Committee Members who were meeting in New York City in



December. This was followed by the American Friends of the Georgian Group, which held its annual General Meeting at the Baker Houses with a fascinating lecture on Georgian follies by architect Madison Cox.

Development

As Dick Jenrette noted, this year was marked with two large and generous bequests from the William L. Thompson Estate and The Richard Hampton Jenrette Foundation. Looking at this year's contributions without these non-recurring gifts, we still have positive numbers to report – a 16% increase in donation revenue and a 19% increase in the number of donations given. Over 600 individual contributions of cash, securities, art and antiques, and real estate were given last year. We also received over \$200,000 in contributions from more than 200 first-time donors in 2014, including 15 new donors giving \$1000 and above. Donors to the Friends of Millford and Friends of Ayr Mount groups have also increased. Additional gifts and support totaling almost \$50,000 were made in memory of William L. Thompson, who passed away in late 2013. Contributions were also made in memory of J.M. and Helen Jenrette, Dick Jenrette's older brother and sister-in-law, who both passed away in the Spring of 2014.

Communications

Our digital footprint consists of our CAHPT website, E-Newsletters and other electronic updates, as well as a growing social media profile. Our website reflects significant increases in traffic and sustained interest, with new visitors up 76%, returning visitors up 24%, and total page-views up as well. In terms of CAHPT's social media presence, overall traffic has increased for Facebook, Pinterest, Twitter and Instagram, which was initiated in 2014. The clear growth in online traffic is only one indication of new interest being generated.

Media coverage this year included UNC-TV's series "Collecting Carolina" showcasing Ayr Mount. *Walter* magazine published an article titled, "RICHARD JENRETTE *Always traveling...home*," by P. Gaye Tapp. *Milieu* magazine highlighted Dick Jenrette's legacy and the work of CAHPT. In the Spring, Richard Behre, a weekly columnist on architecture and preservation for Charleston's *The Post & Courier*, wrote an article on "Richard Jenrette leaving a rich legacy of old houses and new museums." Martha Stewart also wrote about and photographed extensively her visit to Cane Garden for her blog, *themarkthablog.com*. Did we mention that she also came to the December's Garden Conservancy reception at the Baker House in New York City?

Acquisitions

This year's acquisitions consisted of art-related objects and real estate. An elegant mirrored plateau in the Empire taste, made of silvered brass or bronze, and a Regency hurricane lamp, circa 1820, were generously given by Sue and Stuart Feld. Another gift was an extraordinary Louis-Philippe ormolu and *verde antico* marble mantel clock, with the spring mechanism signed and dated 1836, given by Molly and Henry Fair. In addition, Dick Jenrette gave a significant gift of 235 objects to the Trust, which represents the remaining portion of his collection in the mansion at Millford. An anonymous donor also gifted almost seven acres of property near Ayr Mount, which will protect its immediate surroundings from future development.

Accolades

At the start of this year, the Eric Martin Wunsch Award for Excellence in the American Arts was presented to Dick Jenrette and Classical American Homes Preservation Trust, along with American furniture collector, Linda Kaufman. Peter Wunsch created the award in memory of his father to recognize those with a "steadfast focus on preserving America's heritage and making it accessible to so many people to enjoy and learn from." We were the second recipient of this award with Patricia E. Kane, the Friends of American Arts Curator of American Decorative Arts of Yale University Art Gallery, receiving the inaugural one in 2013.

In April, Dick Jenrette received the inaugural Founder's Award from the Charleston Library Society for his dedication to the field of preservation. Anne Cleveland, Executive Director of the Charleston Library Society, remarked how Mr. Jenrette's preservation activities in Charleston, such as the rebuilding of the Mills House Hotel, have garnered national attention and resulted in high-profile exposure of Charleston's preservation and arts communities.

In the Fall, The Albert Simons Medal of Excellence from the Historic Preservation and Community Planning Program of the College of Charleston School of the Arts was also given to Dick Jenrette for his work in historic preservation, and to Thomas Gordon Smith, Professor of Architecture at the University of Notre Dame for his outstanding work in design and education. Prior recipients of The Albert Simons Medal include: His Royal Highness Prince Charles - The Prince of Wales, Mayor Joseph P. Riley, John D. Milner, Andres Duany, Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, and Allan Greenberg.

Homes and Families

How can someone adopt a home? Interestingly enough, most of the houses that belong to Classical American Homes and Dick Jenrette were once owned by families whose family lineage ended. The first two owners of Edgewater, the Lowndes Browns and the Robert Donaldsons, both had families whose lineage ended shortly after they owned the house. Similarly, the Scottish owner of Cane Garden in St. Croix, Christopher McEvoy, Jr., left the island due to poor sugar cane production and taxes, to settle in Copenhagen where he died there without issue. Millford was built by John Laurence Manning and Susan Hampton Manning from 1839-41. Susan Hampton Manning died in childbirth in 1845. John Laurence Manning married Sally Bland Clarke in 1848 and they had four children. After surviving the Civil War, the family never lived at Millford again, and instead John Manning moved to nearby Camden to be with one of his daughters. The original owners of Ayr Mount, William and Margaret Scott Kirkland, had fourteen children. There were four generations of Kirklands who lived there for 170 years. However, when Dick purchased Ayr Mount in 1984, it was from a cousin of the wife of Sam Kirkland, the last Kirkland to live at Ayr Mount. Additionally, Robert William Roper and Martha Laurens Roper, who built Roper House in 1838, had no children to whom the house could be left.

Dick has rescued, adopted and made these homes part of his family. Classical American Homes is poised and ready to help preserve them now and hopefully for the next 200 years. We welcome you to all of our houses and to the CAHPT family.

Speaking of welcoming, I would also like to welcome Peter Kenny to the CAHPT family as my fellow Co-President. We are fortunate to have his scholarship, experience and energy.

Sincerely,



Margize Howell
Co-President



Portrait of *Julia Eliza Montgomery Livingston* (1794-1814) in *the Gardens of Massena* by John Vanderlyn, early 19th century. Julia, painted in a fashionable empire dress of the time, was the younger sister of Margaret Livingston Brown who was given Edgewater as a wedding gift from her father, John R. Livingston.

“The Consummation of Earthly Bliss”: Robert Donaldson’s Blithewood and Some Rare Surviving Furniture at Edgewater

From Peter Kenny

In the early fall of 1818, having just completed his studies at the University of North Carolina, Robert Donaldson penned the following impressions of his voyage by Hudson River steamboat from Albany to New York City:

Passed the celebrated scenery of the Hudson at Night . . . by a Full Moon — which no doubt was more Sublime, than if seen in the Day — as obscurity adds to sublimity — saw West Point.

The Banks are lined with elegant villas — thought it the consummation of Earthly Bliss to live in one of those Palaces, on such a Noble River, under such a Government.

Little could the young North Carolinian have imagined at the time that within ten years he would be living in New York at 15 State Street in the former mansion of the wealthy Scots merchant Archibald Gracie, with commanding views of New York harbor and the mouth of the Hudson River. Nor that his inchoate dream to live one day in an elegant villa along the Hudson would be fulfilled in 1835 with the purchase of Annandale, a 95-acre estate just a few miles north of Edgewater. It was at Annandale that Robert Donaldson and his wife Susan built their idyllic country estate, Blithewood, now sadly demolished, which they transformed over the course of a decade or more into a picturesque villa and landscaped gardens that existed in near-perfect harmony with their natural surroundings (fig. 3).

Susan Donaldson seemed especially pleased with the prospect of developing an upriver estate. Writing to her beloved father, Judge William



Figure 1. Portrait of Robert Donaldson
by Charles R. Leslie (1794-1859). Painted in 1820.

Gaston, in the summer of 1835 she related the exciting news that “Mr. D. has bought a beautiful country seat on the river & our present plan is to pass our summers there & to have a house for the winter in Carolina.” She continued, “I shall *certainly* see you every winter & my husband’s long indulged wish for the country will be gratified.” It is said that Susan bestowed the name Blithewood on the Donaldson estate, suggesting that it was a place of rare beauty and a constant source of joy and contentment for her and her husband. The transformation of Annandale into Blithewood brought boundless opportunities for Robert Donaldson, Esq., to exercise his well-known reputation as *arbiter elegantiarum*, or an ultimate arbiter in matters of taste, in the creation of a country retreat that was in itself a complete work of art.

Building Blithewood took energy, enthusiasm, and artistic sensibility — not to mention prodigious amounts of capital. Writing to her father again the following summer Susan reveals how deeply immersed she and her husband were in their work:

I have literally not had an hour to give to answering letters etc indeed to any thing more intellectual than flowerbeds and borders deciding where this vine & that shrub should be planted. Mr. D seems perfectly in his element & wonders how he existed so long in a City — We find a great deal requiring our attention — things having been left in miserable order or disorder.

The general disrepair referred to in the letter was the residue of several previous occupants on the Annandale estate. The property was

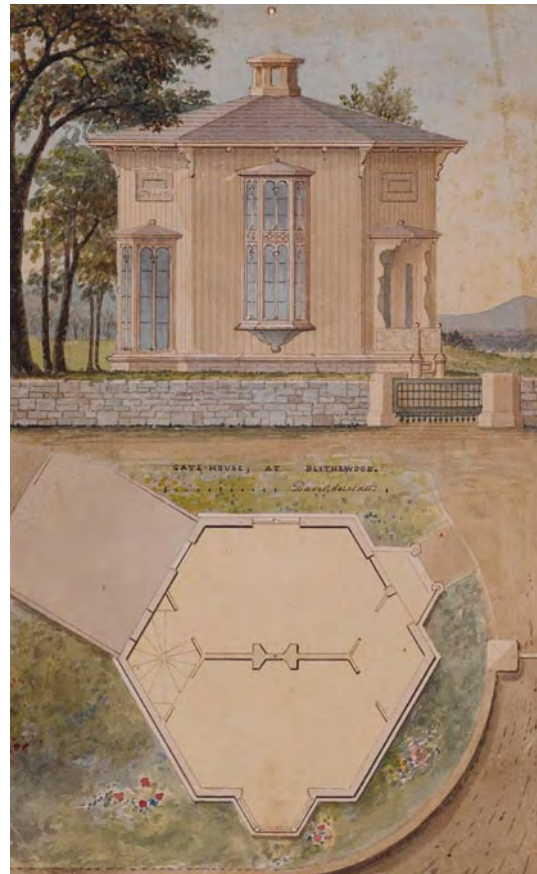


Figure 2. *The Palisades*, No. 19 of the *Hudson River Portfolio* by W. G. Wall, 1820. Photo: Doug Baz.



Figure 3. *Blithewood*, ca. 1841. Original watercolor by Alexander Jackson Davis for engraved frontispiece of Alexander Jackson Downing, *A Treatise and Practice of Landscape Gardening . . .* (1841). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1924 (24.66.361)

Figure 4. Plan for second gatehouse at Blithewood by Alexander Jackson Davis. The gatehouse still stands on the grounds of Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, New York. Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library, Columbia University. 1820.



purchased by General John Armstrong in 1795, who converted an existing sturdy barn into a two-story Federal style dwelling with twelve rooms, a building that must have held little charm for the artistically adventurous Robert Donaldson, who immediately turned his attention to making plans for a total transformation of the house and grounds. To aid him in this ambitious endeavor Donaldson enlisted the noted architect, A. J. Davis, and horticulturalist and landscape designer, Alexander Jackson Downing. In fact, it was Donaldson who brought these two talented designers together for the first time at Blithewood, a meeting that resulted in a creative collaboration that would determine, through their numerous publications, the direction of American architecture and landscape design in the mid-nineteenth century.

In 1836, Davis produced his first design for Blithewood, a gatehouse in the “Rustic Cottage Style” that was later illustrated in Davis’ *Rural*

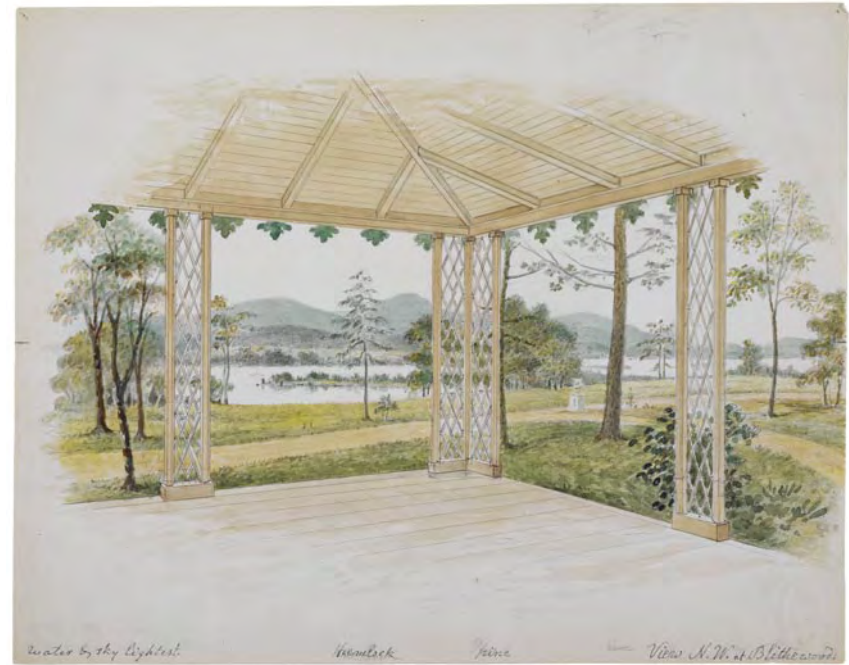


Figure 5. View N. W. at Blithewood, ca. 1841. Watercolor by Alexander Jackson Davis, Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library, Columbia University.

Residences (1838) and is considered today to be one of the first picturesque American Gothic cottages. Other designs provided by Davis for Blithewood included a grapery, a toolhouse, a rustic temple, and a second gatehouse in 1841 (fig. 4). Also begun in 1836 were a series of alterations and additions to the main house that ultimately would take Donaldson nine years to complete. One of the first additions was a large veranda that wrapped around three sides of the house that afforded the Donaldsons the pleasure of comfortable living both indoors and out from the late spring through the glories of a Hudson River Valley autumn (fig. 5). Another architectural innovation of their villa at Blithewood was its broad gable roof supported by ornamental brackets in the eaves, a design that marked the beginning of the so-called American bracketed style of architecture.

After six years of perfecting Blithewood, the Donaldsons decided in 1841 to sell their townhouse in lower Manhattan and make Blithewood



Figure 6. Card table by Duncan Phyfe, 1822. This is one of a pair of richly gilded rosewood veneered card tables shipped by Phyfe to Robert Donaldson in Fayetteville, North Carolina in 1822 and listed on the original bill of sale for \$100.00. Photo: Doug Baz.

their permanent home. They brought upriver at this time all of their family possessions, including the richly ornamented Grecian style furniture that Robert Donaldson had purchased from Duncan Phyfe, New York's premier cabinetmaker, on at least two occasions—once in 1822 for his family home in Fayetteville, North Carolina (fig. 6) and then again around 1827 when he purchased the State Street house. Today, much of this Phyfe furniture is at Edgewater, where it is the pride of the collection (see pages 4 and 6). But what of the additional new furniture purchases Robert and Susan Donaldson made prior to moving their New York City furniture there in 1841? Some undoubtedly has been lost to time, but at Edgewater there are at least two pieces of furniture, one particularly evocative, that offer a sense of the direction the Donaldsons' taste was taking at the time.

The first of these two is a rosewood veneered center table with satinwood inlay (fig. 7) that is tucked away in the cozy library on the third floor at Edgewater. Its Donaldson provenance is impeccable, having come there as part of a bequest by Mary Cromwell Allison, Robert and Susan Donaldson's great grand-daughter, of paintings, furniture, porcelains and works on paper that survived from the Donaldson family's tenure at Edgewater between 1852 and 1902. (The lively story of the circumstances surrounding this bequest is related in Dick's book, *More Adventures with Old Houses: The Edgewater Experience*.)

The center table was made in France during the reign of Louis-Philippe (1830-1848) and is in a late classical style with delicate s-curved legs recalling earlier Louis XV designs. Though made in France, it almost



Figure 7. Center table,
French, 1835-1840.
Photo: Doug Baz.



Figure 8. Detail of the inlaid top
on the center table in figure 7.
Photo: Doug Baz.



Figure 8. Third floor library at Edgewater with the extraordinary book collection formed by the late William L. Thompson and the inlaid rosewood center table from Robert Donaldson's *Blithewood*. Photo: Gavin Ashworth.

certainly was purchased in New York City from one of several French-born cabinetmakers, or *ébénistes*, who operated there with great success in the 1830s and 1840s and provided significant challenges to established cabinetmakers such as Duncan Phyfe. These French *ébénistes* established furniture manufactories and showrooms where they sold locally made and imported French furniture, and filled custom orders from France for their elite New York clientele. Included among these French artisans was the well-known nineteenth-century New York City cabinetmaker, Alexander Roux, who immigrated to New York in 1835, and Auguste-Émile Ringuet-Leprince, who came there from Paris in 1843. Another lesser-known figure was George Ponsot, who was active in New York from 1830-1854. A recently discovered French *secrétaire à abattant* signed, "G. Ponsot," and inlaid with satinwood in rosewood veneer in a manner similar to the Donaldson center table is at Frederic Church's home, Olana, in Hudson, New York. Given that Ponsot was a known importer

of French Louis-Philippe inlaid furniture, it may be that the Donaldson center table was either purchased at his furniture emporium ready-made or specially ordered from France.

The beautiful inlaid decoration on the top of the Donaldson's center table — two lovebirds encircled by a wreath of meandering grapevines (fig. 8) — is a delicate combination of naturalism and romanticism, and particularly well suited, it would seem, for use in a picturesque country villa such as Blithewood. Relatively lightweight and equipped with casters, it's nice to imagine it being brought outdoors onto the veranda in good weather, where the couple could enjoy tea or a light meal with a view of their landscaped grounds, the Hudson River, and the distant Catskill Mountains. The two lovebirds depicted in the top take on additional meaning in this context, symbolizing, perhaps, the happiness Robert and Susan Donaldson found working together creatively in the late 1830s on their idyllic country retreat.

A second piece of Donaldson furniture that almost certainly was purchased for Blithewood is a delightful little Gothic style armchair (fig. 9) with a caned seat, also the gift of Mary Cromwell Allison, that currently is tucked away in the dressing room for the master bedroom at Edgewater. Made of highly figured curly maple, a wood much prized by furniture-makers that occurs randomly in lumber sawn from the American sugar maple tree, the armchair is now a burnished rich amber color due to the effects of age. Its original function was as a slipper chair, in which one sat to remove his or her shoes, a function expressed in its squat proportions and low seat height — about 14 inches as opposed to around 17 inches on a standard chair — as well as its curiously embowed arm supports made to accommodate the outwardly thrust elbows of a person bent over tying or untying his or her shoes. To appreciate the slipper chair's height differential, simply look at how high up the arms enter the rear stiles or, conversely, how low its handsomely pierced Gothic back appears in relation to the arms. Light, compact and elegant, this slipper armchair is a perfect example of form following function in furniture design. It is also a highly personal article used in the Donaldson's dressing room or bedroom that serves to humanize them and to bridge the historical gap between their time and ours.

The Donaldsons sold Blithewood in 1852 when they purchased Edgewater, which would become their final home. Once again, all their possessions were moved to their new home, including, among other

things, the Duncan Phyfe furniture from the Fayetteville and New York City houses as well as the later furniture they purchased for Blithewood. After Robert Donaldson's death, Edgewater remained in the family for another 30 years until it was eventually sold in 1902 and the furniture taken by his daughter, Isabel Donaldson Bronson, to her new home in Summit, New Jersey. Apparently for financial reasons during the depression years both she and her daughter, Mrs. James W. Cromwell, were forced to sell a fair amount of the Phyfe furniture, with some it eventually being acquired by the prominent American furniture collectors, Mrs. J. Amory Haskell and Henry Francis du Pont. Luckily, she also gave some of the furniture to her granddaughter, Mary Cromwell Stuart (later Mary Cromwell Allison), who eventually returned it to Edgewater where she felt it belonged. The acquisition of original Donaldson furniture for Edgewater continues. In late 2013 a pair of card tables (fig. 6) listed on the original 1822 bill of sale from Duncan Phyfe to Robert Donaldson, probably sold earlier by Isabel Bronson, was acquired for Edgewater with funds donated by the late Bill Thompson. More Donaldson furniture remains out there in public and private hands and we at Classical American Homes Preservation Trust continue to pursue opportunities to bring as much of it as possible back home.

The houses associated with Classical American Homes Preservation Trust are full of rare and wonderful treasures that serve to illuminate the lives and times of their occupants. When you next find yourself at Edgewater, please be sure to ask to see the center table and slipper armchair from Blithewood, unsung yet poignant reminders of the picturesque country villa that once stood on the banks of that noblest of rivers, the Hudson.

Sincerely,



Peter Kenny
Co-President

[Biographical information for this article was derived from Jean Bradley Anderson's *Carolinian on the Hudson: The Life of Robert Donaldson* (1996), which is available for purchase at classicalamericanhomes.org.]



Figure 9. Slipper armchair,
New York, 1835-1840.
Photo: Doug Baz.

Classical American Homes Preservation Trust

Income Statement

(for the 12 month period ending December 31st)

Income	2014	2013
Events/ Tours	\$ 75,923	\$ 76,232
Contributions - Cash	4,800,790	1,678,027
Contributions - Non-Cash	1,159,427	578,000
Dividends & Interest	370,098	389,832
Realized Gains	235,336	443,528
Rental Income	16,100	6,800
Book Revenue	8,880	11,279
Gross Income	\$ 6,666,554	\$ 3,183,698
Expenses		
Operating Expenses	1,882,969	1,754,584
Depreciation Charges - Non-Cash	339,999	325,881
Charitable Distributions	10,000	5,300
Marketing and Fund Raising	176,571	170,230
Professional Services	71,344	42,212
Federal Taxes	15,763	12,942
Total Expenses	\$ 2,496,646	\$ 2,311,149
Net Income (Loss)	\$ 4,169,908	\$ 872,549
Pro-forma Adjustment (for the 12 month period ending December 31st)		
Reported Net Income	\$ 4,169,908	\$ 872,549
Add Back: Depreciation Charges - Non-Cash	339,999	325,881
Changes in Unrealized Appreciation of Securities	578,365	891,409
Subtract: Contributions - Non Cash	(1,159,427)	(578,000)
Adjusted Net Income	\$ 3,928,845	\$ 1,511,839

Classical American Homes Preservation Trust

Balance Sheet

(for the 12 month period ending December 31st)

Assets	2014	2013
Current Assets		
Net Cash Balance - Bank Accounts	\$ 440,891	\$ 365,812
Marketable Securities at FMV	15,611,540	11,953,402
Total Current Assets	\$ 16,052,431	\$ 12,319,214
Property and Equipment		
Real Estate, at Adjusted Cost	13,439,387	13,502,528
Antiques & Furnishings, at Cost	7,606,012	6,556,826
Office & Related Equipment, at Cost	53,457	24,446
Total Property & Equipment	\$ 21,098,856	\$ 20,083,800
Total Assets	\$ 37,151,287	\$ 32,403,014
Liabilities and Equity		
Liabilities	-	-
Equity		
Net Worth - Opening Balance	32,403,014	30,639,056
Changes in Unrealized Appr./Depr. of Securities	578,365	891,409
Net Income (Loss)	4,169,908	872,549
Total Equity	\$ 37,151,287	\$ 32,403,014
Total Liabilities and Equity	\$ 37,151,287	\$ 32,403,014



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Opposite: The Drawing Room at Edgewater, with its three tall French doors opening to the river and ensemble of furniture by Duncan Phyfe and his contemporaries, is a study in classical beauty and light. Photo: John M. Hall.

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View of Edgewater's colonnaded façade and domed octagonal library addition surrounded by ancient locust trees and the Hudson River. Photo: Gavin Ashworth.



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